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UNITED NATIONS CHILDREN'S FUND
Executive Board
Special session

INFORMATION

STATEMENT BY ROBERT THOMSON, PRESIDENT, NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS COMMITTEE ON UNICEF

Response to the draft Declaration and Plan of Action of the World Summit for Children

1. The Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO) Committee on UNICEF draws the attention of the UNICEF Executive Board to the following comments it has shared with the Chairman of the Summit Planning Committee's Working Group on the Declaration.

2. These comments, which the NGO Committee believes contribute to achieving a broad consensus on the Declaration and Plan of Action, represent the views of a range of NGOs active in child-related programmes, advocacy and fund-raising. They are supplemented by the commentaries of individual NGOs and by key statements on the issues of the Summit, which were carefully prepared by major humanitarian and development NGOs, and by youth organizations with broad membership among the population addressed by the Summit Declaration and Plan of Action.

3. NGOs welcome the initiatives of the Summit and recognize, in particular, the valuable contribution the Summit process has made to encouraging popular participation in development. The invitation made to a representative group of NGOs to attend Summit-related activities and, indeed, the opening and closing sessions of the Summit, is a mark of commitment by the Heads of State or Government to achieving the goals of children and development through creative co-operation with all sectors of society. NGOs believe that this should continue, with NGO participation in national and international programme planning and delivery.

4. The Declaration and Plan of Action call attention to an important moral and material imperative - the concept of a "first call for children". Recent global events have shown that a safe and secure future for the youngest and most

vulnerable generations can only be secured through the constant commitment of resources to their development and protection. In good times and bad, the human family has to make the well-being of all children its highest goal.

5. Further, we note with satisfaction, for example, that the UNICEF goals for health and nutrition annexed to the Plan of Action call for "special attention to the health and nutrition of the female child, and pregnant and lactating woman" and that breast-feeding is given due importance. In addition, we support UNICEF goals for reducing malnutrition.

6. We also note your attention to the recommendations that came out of the Education for All Conference in Jomtien, Thailand. We appreciate your attention to basic education and early childhood education and on reducing the disparity in education between boys and girls.

7. After considerable consultation in the NGO community, and in comparing the draft Declaration and Plan of Action with recent statements of the Committee and other NGO groupings, the following points emerge which merit further attention by the drafting group.

8. NGOs are particularly committed to the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. This is not seen as the simple acquisition of an additional legal text, but as the fundamental shift of attitude which views the quality of children's lives and the economic development and political stability of future generations as a question of children's human rights.

9. By recognizing that children's rights are violated, both in industrialized and developing countries, and that national and international programmes should provide not just services but a moral initiative, the Declaration and Plan of Action would help to create the necessary change.

10. Achievement of access to services, in health and education in particular, is essential to the full implementation of the Convention. NGOs would welcome the inclusion of a statement of commitment by all Heads of State or Government to reorientate budgets towards the provision of services of human development. Such a commitment at a time of devastating debt servicing and military spending would be a sign of hope to the people.

11. Among those who suffer most, and who would expect most from the Summit, are those children living in especially difficult circumstances - whether in developed or developing countries. The Declaration and Plan of Action rightly draw attention to the hardest to reach children and those most neglected by current programmes. None the less, much progress has been made in defining children in especially difficult circumstances, as well as the goals and strategies to reach them (see document E/ICEF/1986/L.3). NGOs have further identified other children at risk in specific situations. It is more appropriate to use the carefully worked out categories in paragraph 5 (f) of the statement to the World Summit for Children by humanitarian and development NGOs such as children in especially difficult circumstances, including children deprived of family care; abandoned and street children; disabled children; physically, mentally or sexually abused children;

child victims of commercial exploitation; exploited working children; children in armed conflicts; refugee, migrant, and internally displaced children; children in extreme poverty; and children deprived of liberty, than to amalgamate all types of children in particular need. By acknowledging the specific categories of difficult circumstances, the Declaration and Plan of Action will identify more easily appropriate and distinct development targets.

12. One of the most traumatic of difficult circumstances for children is their involvement in armed conflicts, whether as victims or child soldiers. International humanitarian laws to protect them exist, but reference in the Declaration and Plan of Action to the need to respect them could help to call attention to this violation of children's rights.

13. Meeting the needs of all children, particularly in the sectors of health care and education, requires delivery systems that are appropriate, equitable and sustainable, and that are community-based and participatory, while enjoying universal political and professional credibility. Happily, two such strategies for service delivery exist. The primary health care approach has brought about progress in human well-being despite a context of undernutrition, inadequate safe drinking water and access to sanitation, and large-scale commercial promotion of life-threatening products such as tobacco, alcohol and breast-milk substitutes. The Education for All initiatives - meeting basic learning needs through creative formal and non-formal means - is poised to achieve widespread competence in lifeskills such as literacy and numeracy. Having played an important role in bringing these strategies to the fore, NGOs would welcome a clear commitment to them in the Declaration, Plan of Action and resource provision.

14. The role of NGOs, United Nations agencies and Governments in matters of development is to facilitate the involvement and full participation of communities, young people, local leaders, families and individuals in accessible projects, plans and programmes which are likely to improve the well-being of those same people. NGOs are particularly close to the intended beneficiaries of development, especially when it concerns children's programmes. That is why we call attention to the importance of including a commitment to NGO involvement and popular participation in achieving the survival, protection and development of children.

15. If we have raised the above issues, it is because we feel that the Declaration and Plan of Action are important documents in terms of their potential impact on the well-being of children. Nevertheless, we appreciate the fact that it is not possible for all aspects of the many needs of all children to be covered in these documents. However, we would hope that the issues raised above will be taken into account, particularly in the programme planning process undertaken by Governments when they return to their respective countries. We, as NGOs, will on our part be meeting in the days to come to examine the constructive role that we can play in following up on the many valuable recommendations that will result from this World Summit for Children.

READEX FICHE

Annex

Comments on the draft Declaration and Plan of Action have been received from the following NGOs:

Cooperative for American Relief Everywhere, Inc.

Defense for Children International

Federation Internationale Terre des Hommes

Inter-African Committee on Traditional Practices

International Association of Logopedics and Phoniatrics

International Baby Food Action Network

International Board on Books for Young People

International Catholic Child Bureau

International Federation of Business and Professional Women

International Federation of University Women

Kids Meeting Kids Can Make a Difference

League of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

NGO Committee on UNICEF Working Group on Education

NGO Committee on UNICEF Working Group on Nutrition and Health

NGO Committee on UNICEF Working Group on the Rights of the Child

The Population Council

Radda Barnen

World Leisure and Recreation Association

World Union of Catholic Women's Organizations

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STATEMENT BY THE BRAHMA KUMARIS WORLD SPIRITUAL UNIVERSITY

Learning to achieve "Education for All"

1. As we move into a decade of meeting the goals set forth by the World Conference on Education for All, we need not only to extend and maximize the available human and technological resources for education, but also to devise more cost- and time-effective techniques for learning.

2. The Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University (BKWSU), having observed the learning process in both conventional and non-conventional systems of education, has found a direct correlation between learning acquisition/outcome and the following factors:

(a) Environment. The physical and emotional support a child receives both at home and in the classroom is crucial in the development of the child's intellectual and mental faculties. In addition to commonly recognized factors such as nutrition, health, cleanliness, etc., high priority needs to be given to such factors as a low level of noise and distraction, family stability, appreciation and encouragement by adults and peers and the existence of appropriate adult role models in order to create an adequate learning environment;

(b) Positive attitudes and aptitudes. Children form attitudes to learning based on the joy and satisfaction they derive from the time of learning, as well as from what they perceive as the end result of their years of learning. Accordingly, children become more positive towards school and education when (a) objects, persons and places they are interested in and like are included in the learning process in an experiential way; and (b) short-term goals and practical incentives are offered during the term of learning;

(c) Exercise of co-operative learning skills. In keeping with recent world-wide trends in education, and as revealed by responses, especially those from

educational institutions, to Global Co-operation for a Better World (a two-year-long Peace Messenger Initiative co-ordinated in many countries for a major period by BKWSU), we can reaffirm, while acknowledging each pupil's individuality and specialty, that when pupils think and do things together, deeper and much more meaningful experiences in learning are produced.

3. Teachers and students in at least 20 countries who used a special school pack that was created for the project reported the following benefits from its use:

(a) Achievement of co-operation through the development of personal qualities;

(b) Fostering of positive attitudes both in classroom situations and out of school;

(c) Greater insight among both teachers and students into the learning process;

(d) Opportunities for exercises in imagination and originality;

(e) Help for children in developing concentration and other learning abilities;

(f) Making learning a "happy experience";

(g) Motivating students to be informed and involved in world issues through international exchange.

4. In view of these observations and its experience over the past 54 years, BKWSU considers itself to be in a position to recommend to the appropriate organizations within States to include in school curricula, wherever possible, training in the following basic human skills to enhance the learning process:
(a) positive/creative thinking; (b) practical co-operation and communication; and (c) re-examination of values within the context of personal thinking and behaviour.

5. In the long run, such curricula will not only encourage people to become more responsible for learning essential life skills, but also ensure that they enjoy the freedom to learn what is appropriate for them, using methods appropriate for them, thus allowing for the full potential of all world citizens to be realized. Let us not forget: "The process of getting there is just as valuable as the goal itself."